60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Riddles of reality
Aliens' many masks
Centaurs, scales and scorpions
Geraldine Cummins
Rites and wrongs

111

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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Rites and wrongs

Magical rituals have been performed since time immemorial and are still used today – and not just in primitive tribes. FRANCIS KING reveals the power of rites to fulfil our wishes – for good or for evil

THE PERFORMING OF RITES, that is to say, ceremonial observances, plays a bigger part in our lives than most of us realise. Even people who have never, for example, been present at a barmitzvah, the Jewish 'rite of passage' that marks the transition from boyhood to manhood, or witnessed a celebration of the Christian Eucharist, have probably attended a twenty-first birthday party – the 'ceremonial observance' of the attainment of an adulthood that, in purely legal terms, is reached some three years earlier.

Young girls of the Caraya tribe of Peru perform a dance for the Sun to mark the onset of puberty; if they did not take part in this age-old ritual they would not be considered to be truly adult

When we throw a pinch of spilt salt over our shoulders, mutter 'Bless you' when a friend sneezes, or perform some other rite, however simple, we are following a pattern of behaviour that is probably almost as old as humanity itself. From prehistoric graves it is clear that our Stone Age ancestors carried out elaborate funeral rituals and most of the primitive communities that have survived into modern times seem to practise highly formalised and complex ceremonies to mark birth, puberty and death.

While it is impossible for us to know exactly what beliefs our prehistoric forbears

Aubrey Beardsley's illustration for the text of Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*, which inspired Aleister Crowley to perform one of his more repulsive and risible ceremonies. He solemnly baptised a cockerel with the name of John the Baptist and then beheaded it, in a manner loosely based on the relevant scene in Wilde's play. This ceremony was supposed to undermine the influence of Christianity, but Crowley's very act showed that he, at least, was obsessed with the subject

held, it is likely that from the very beginnings of ritual they associated it with magic and the supernatural. A proper ceremony not only *marked* a particular event in life but in some way *produced* that event. If, for example, a man or woman had not undergone the appropriate rituals associated with the attainment of adulthood he or she was not considered a 'real adult' in spite of all appearances to the contrary.

It was only a short mental step from thinking that sexually mature individuals were not adult humans because they had not been *made* adults by the appropriate rite to thinking that the proper ceremonies would turn some non-human entity or thing (a tree or a clay image, for example) into a sort of honorary human being.

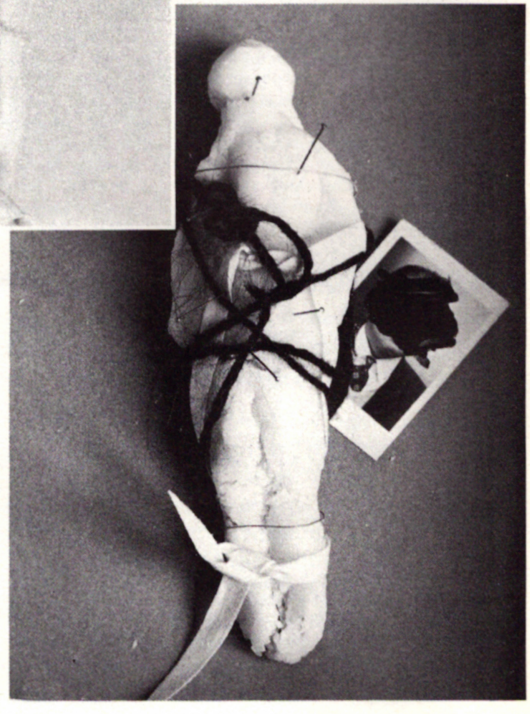
The taste of deception

Strange as such a mode of thinking may appear it has persisted throughout history and has even survived into historically recent times. In the late medieval period an abbot who yearned to eat meat during Lent was accused of adopting the ingenious device of baptising a sheep with the name of 'Carp', butchering it, and then eating it during the fast under the pleasant conviction that, whatever appeared to be on his plate, it was in substance fish, not mutton.

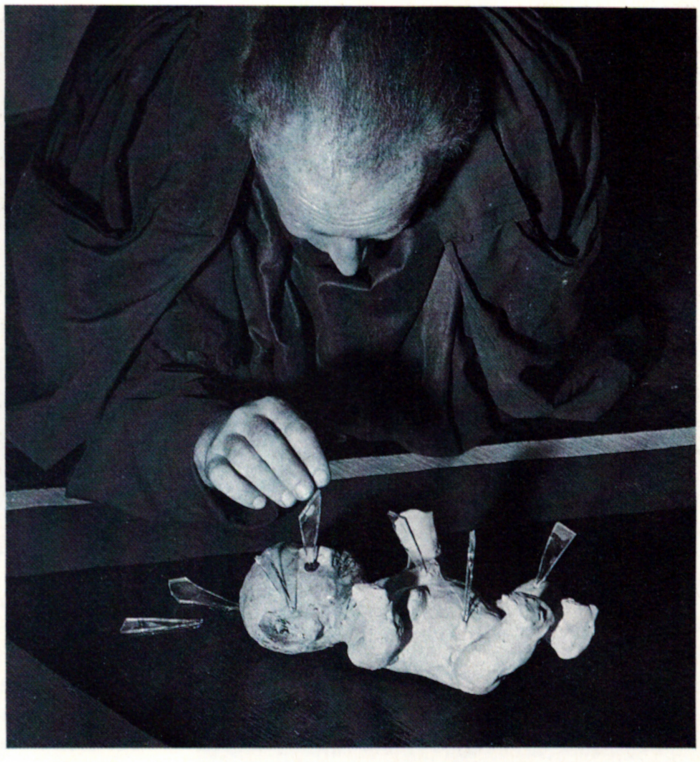
As recently as the 1930s the fanatically anti-Christian occultist Aleister Crowley (see page 2081) employed baptism in much the same way. He had a cockerel baptised with the name of John (the Baptist) and then solemnly beheaded in an elaborate ceremony based on Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*. This was supposed to destroy, in some mysterious way, the influence of Christianity upon the world. However, along with a similar Crowleyan unpleasantness, the crucifixion of a toad that he had baptised 'Jesus of Nazareth', the rite seems to have been singularly ineffective.

If a clay doll, a wax image, or – as in the two strange Crowleyan rites mentioned above – an animal, is supposedly given the inner qualities of a particular living being by means of baptism or some other ceremonial observance, it is believed that a 'magical link' is established between the image and the living being. In some way they have become mystically identified with one another, and anything that affects the image or animal will, so it is argued, affect its 'psychic twin' in a similar way.

If a peasant wanted to kill an enemy he would make a realistic image of him and baptise it with the enemy's name. To make the psychic identification of image and enemy as close as possible he would endeavour to obtain some hair and/or nail clippings of his intended victim and incorporate them with the clay or wax from which he moulded his image. Then he would perhaps hammer nails or pins into the image



Dolls, or wax effigies, have long been used as magical aids. A male and a female doll (above), bound together as if making love, are traditionally used to secure a lover. But darker thoughts inspired this doll (right), bound tightly and stabbed with pins and placed face down, with a photograph and strands of hair of the intended victim. A sick mind may have devised it, but there is evidence that such 'games' can be deadly



A woman who sent a curse in the form of a letter to the 'Witches' Kitchen' coven at Castletown, Isle of Man, provoked Cecil Williamson, the group's leader, to respond with all his painstaking art. First, he made a 'poppet' to represent the woman who had cursed the coven, then he appealed to the spirits for power. Next he breathed 'life' into the doll through a straw in its mouth (above left). Symbolically and, magicians believe, in some way *actually*, the doll had become the woman. Then Williamson inserted glass splinters into various parts of her body (above right); as long as the candles burned she would 'feel torment sharper than the sting of needles'. In ritual magic, it is often the person with the greater hate – and ingenuity – who wins the psychic battle

or slowly destroy it – melting it over a slow fire if it was made of wax, or putting it in a wet place if it was made of clay. As the fire or water wasted away the image, so the body of the enemy would also waste away.

A similar, if more kindly intentioned, process was often employed for sexual ends. A girl who desired a man would make images of herself and her beloved, incorporating, when possible, hair, nails, and bodily secretions in the images and endowing them with prominent genitals in a state of sexual excitement. The images would be baptised with the appropriate names and then tied together with thread (usually red – a colour psychologically associated with sexual excitement) as though energetically copulating. Soon the man's sexual desires would be directed towards the sorceress who, by this simple magical rite, had captured his love – or so it was believed.

Were such magic rites effective? Sometimes, so it would seem, for there are well-authenticated cases even in modern times of the mysterious and medically inexplicable deaths of those who have been attacked by ritual magic involving the use of images. Exactly why these victims die is uncertain. It may be that there really is some 'magical link', created by ritual, between image and victim. Or it may be that the concentrated hate that the sorcerer pours out upon the image of his enemy telepathically exerts a destructive influence. More probably the victim is aware, or very strongly suspects, that ritual magic is being used by an enemy and kills himself by autosuggestion – dying, quite literally, of fright.

Two stories from the 1930s that give support to the latter idea, although they involved injury rather than death, were told by the American journalist William Seabrook. The first concerned a certain French concert pianist – Seabrook called him Jean Dupuis to disguise his real identity. A student of Rosicrucianism, astrology and other aspects of occultism, he had become involved with a dubious 'esoteric group' with which he had subsequently quarrelled. The group, angry at the musician's defection, decided to ruin him by using a combination of ritual image magic and applied psychology in order to destroy his ability to play.

Five-finger exercise

The magic came first. A doll was made in the image of Dupuis, baptised with his name and clad in miniature evening dress such as he wore on the concert platform. Then its hands were placed in a vice that was slowly tightened each day.

The psychology followed. Supposed friends of the victim, but in actuality members of the group that was working against him, began to make comments and ask questions. His finger-work seemed less dextrous than usual, they remarked. Perhaps he was in need of a few days rest? Had he sprained his wrist, they enquired, or was he suffering from neuritis?

Within a week or two the sly suggestions began to take effect. Jean Dupuis became excessively aware of his fingers. His playing began to degenerate. Then, a few days before a concert appearance, he received an anonymous note, beginning 'I can tell you what is wrong with your hands, but it is so frightful that I am almost afraid to tell you.' The letter then proceeded to go into occult theories about magical links between images and men

– matters that the writer knew the pianist had studied – and concluded by giving details of the doll with its hands held in a vice. On the night of the concert a second note arrived: 'The handle of the vice will be slowly turned tonight, until your hands are crushed.'

The concert was a disaster: 'a false note, then a succession of jangling chords, followed by worse fumbling . . . whispers and hisses from the outraged audience . . . the young man half turned to the audience, resumed desperately, and, after a ghastly parody of the next few bars . . . fled from the stage in shame and confusion.'

Sinister rites

In this case the victim was a student of the occult, a believer in ritual magic and its powers to hurt or kill. The other story told by Seabrook does, however, illustrate the fact that such sinister rites may sometimes exert an influence upon even those who do not consciously believe in their efficacy.

In this instance the victim was Louis, a French motor mechanic, the lover of a young girl whose peasant grandmother, a woman locally reputed to dabble in witchcraft, took an intense and unreasoning dislike to him. One day Louis and the old woman quarrelled violently and almost came to blows. As the two parted, Louis to set off along a well-marked mountain path, the grandmother to return to her nearby cottage, the supposed witch chanted an incantation:

Tangled mind will twist and turn,
And tangled foot will follow . . .
So tangle, tangle, twist and turn,
For tangling webs are woven.

By nightfall Louis had not returned from his walk and a search party was sent out. He was found some distance from the path, entangled in briars, unable to walk, his legs paralysed although physically uninjured. He said that he had wandered off the path, became dizzy and increasingly confused, and suffered some sort of stroke that had paralysed him. He was ill, he asserted, and so he continued to assert even after the local doctor had been unable to find any physical injury to account for his condition.

Above: William B. Seabrook with the Ivory Coast forest people, including a young witch called Wamba, in the 1920s. Seabrook travelled widely and discovered the universality of magical rites. One of the most striking cases of magical ill-wishing he recorded took place in France. A young man called Louis fell foul of his girlfriend's grandmother – and was found lying in a briar patch, paralysed. Later, Seabrook found a doll tangled in briars in the old woman's cellar

Below: a medieval magical incantation, according to the 'Key of Solomon' – one of the most important of all grimoires

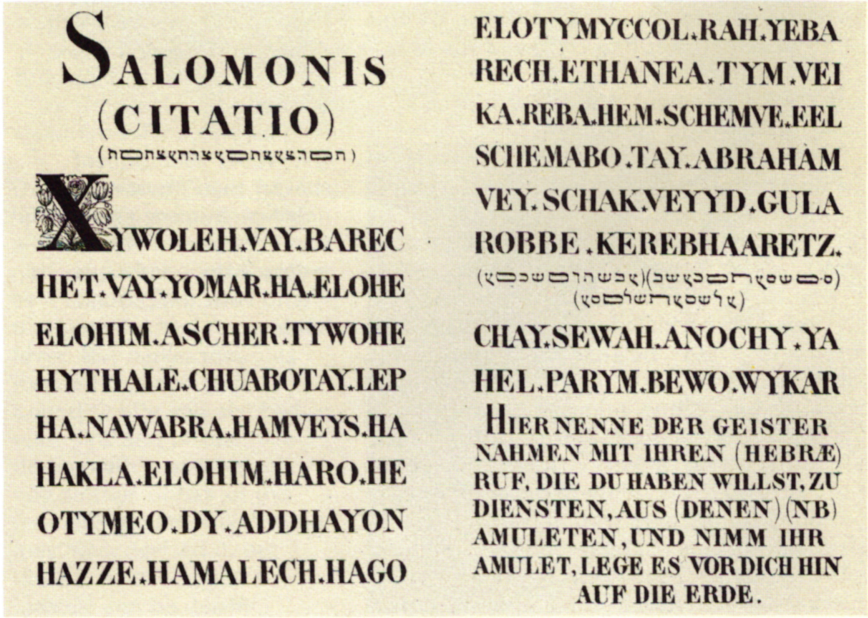
Eventually Seabrook, convinced that ritual magic was responsible for Louis's condition, raided the old wine cellar in which the grandmother practised her witchcraft. On the floor was laid out a miniature landscape, 'a tangled labyrinth of thorns and briars'. In its midst lay an image of Louis, its eyes bandaged, its feet tied and enmeshed in thorns and brambles.

Powerless and paralysed

Seabrook took the doll and showed it to Louis, who was annoyed that the old woman had attempted to harm him but still refused to accept that her activities had in any way been responsible for his paralysed state. 'I don't believe any of it,' he said, 'I've had a stroke.' He lay there, victim of his own unconscious imagination, yet his conscious mind, paradoxically enough, was lacking in the imaginative ability to understand the real cause of his paralysis. If he had been able to understand that primitive beliefs in sorcery and the supernatural lurked in the hidden depths of his own mind, he would once again have been able to walk.

These two cases represent only the most primitive strand in ritual magic, for the rites employed were extremely simple. As long ago as classical times, however, far more complex forms of ritual magic were evolved. The formulae, techniques, and other secrets of such elaborate occult systems are enshrined in the *grimoires* – text books of ceremonial magic.

Exactly when and where the first grimoires were compiled is uncertain. But something very like them existed in ancient Egypt, while magical works, many of them of Jewish origin, were circulated widely in the later centuries of the Roman Empire. It is probable that the European grimoires of the



medieval period were derived from the latter, for they show much evidence of Jewish influence. The authorship of many of them was attributed to King Solomon, who, according to legend, was such a master of magic that he had dominion over men, demons, and even the angels of heaven.

The *Clavicula Salomonis* and other magical works attributed to the great Jewish King display, like almost all the grimoires, a notable moral ambivalence. The hard core of the ritual magic of these works is the 'raising to visible appearance' of spirits, good and bad, with the object of obtaining benefits of one sort or another – usually wealth, power or knowledge – from these beings.

The processes used for these rites fall into three stages. First, the preparation of the materials and implements to be used in the ceremony; secondly, the preparation of the magician's own mind and body; and, thirdly, the actual performance of the rite.

Left: one of the images carved on the wall of a house at Bunbury, Cheshire, by a poacher who had been deported by the squire. On his return the poacher carved three images – to represent the squire and his two henchmen – and cursed them daily, as witches do with dolls. The three men soon died. There are very few cases recorded in which a person died without any knowledge of being cursed; the realisation that psychic venom is being concentrated upon one must be a major subconscious factor in such 'magical' deaths

The first of these stages must have been found difficult by many magicians past and present. It involves the experimenter compounding incense, moulding candles, and first manufacturing and then consecrating a variety of 'magical weapons', including a wand, a sword, and even a sickle. These processes are often extremely complex. One grimoire, for example, instructs the magician to forge his sickle one hour after sunrise on a Wednesday, thrice bring it to a red heat and immerse it in a mixture of herbal extracts and the blood of a magpie.

The preparations enjoined upon the magician are sometimes almost as burdensome. One text tells the experimenter to build a stone altar on a river bank before dawn, behead a white cockerel at the moment of sunrise, throw its head in the river, drink its blood and burn its body. He must then jump into the river, climb out backwards, don new clothing and return to his dwelling.

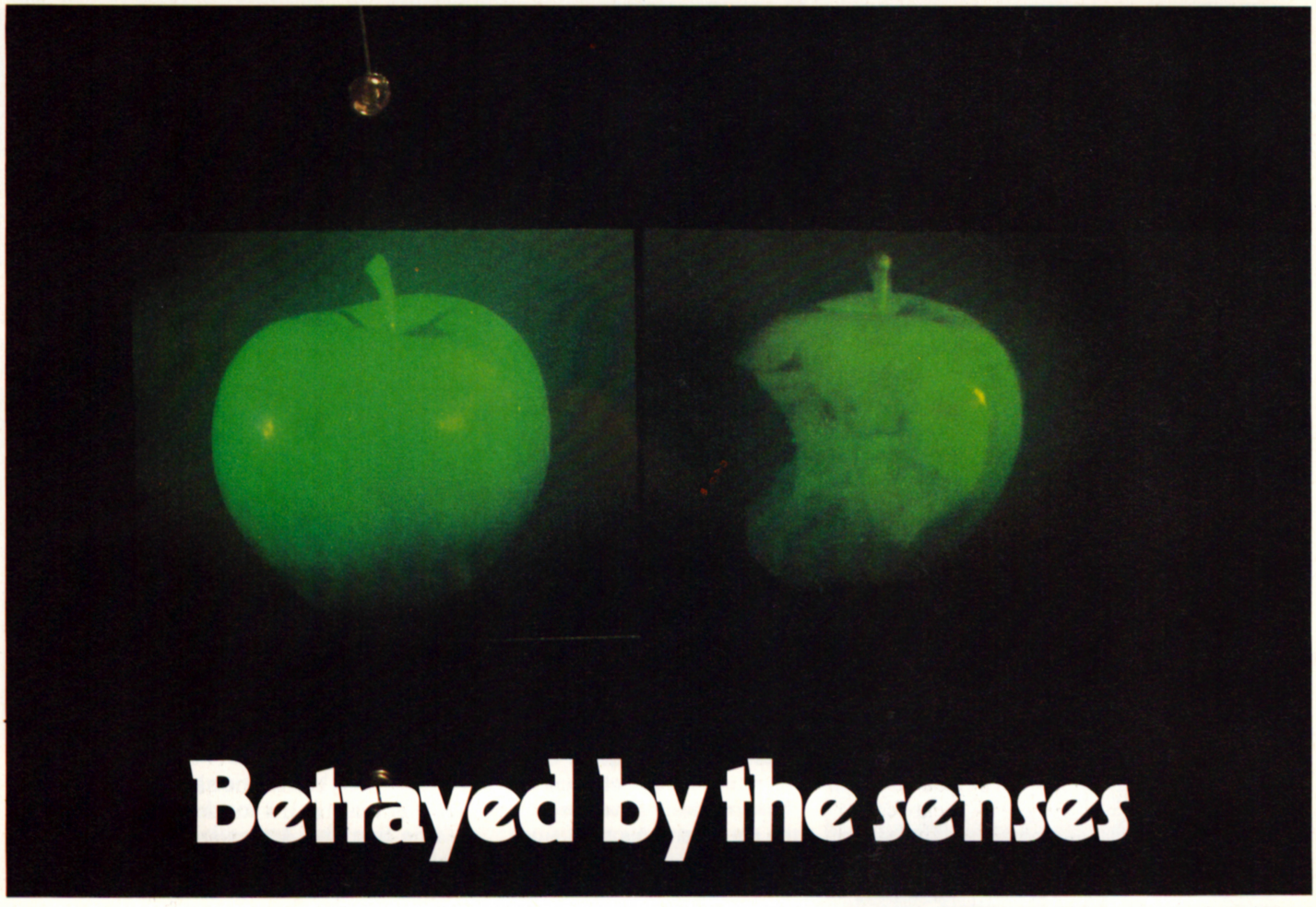
Right: a common, if melodramatic, image of the ritual magician, summoning demons while standing in his magic circle, grimoire at his feet and loathsome 'familiars' cavorting around. Yet essentially the image is correct; a devoted magician will use ancient texts to summon up spirits and stand, often for hours, inside a magic circle. And he may indeed succeed in producing some entity – but it may be only an hallucination, owing its appearance more to the result of his long fast and meditation than to the use of 'the words of power'

The first two stages successfully accomplished, the magician can proceed to the ritual itself. He stands within a circle inscribed with names and symbols designed to protect him from demons who might wish to destroy him, He burns incenses, brandishes his magical implements, and chants the lengthy and sonorous incantations given in the grimoires. Eventually the spirit appears and gives the magician the things he desires. Or so some occultists believe.

On the face of it many of the processes involved in the ritual magic of the grimoires are so absurd – and often so repellent – that no normal person would wish to carry them out. This has led some modern occultists to deny that the texts of the grimoires are to be taken literally. These works, so it is argued, are written in a code only fully understandable by initiates. Thus, for example, one grimoire teaches a method of giving someone a sleepless night: 'Pick a June lily under a waning moon, soak it in laurel juice and bury it in dung. Worms will breed therein. Dry them and scatter on your enemy's pillow.' This means, say those who believe the grimoires to be written in code, invoke the demons Lilith (the June lily) and Q'areb Zareg (the laurel), both of whom are reputed to give bad dreams.

Similar interpretations are employed by modern practitioners of ritual magic – and there are a surprising number of these.

What kinds of ritual magic are practised today – and why? See page 2226



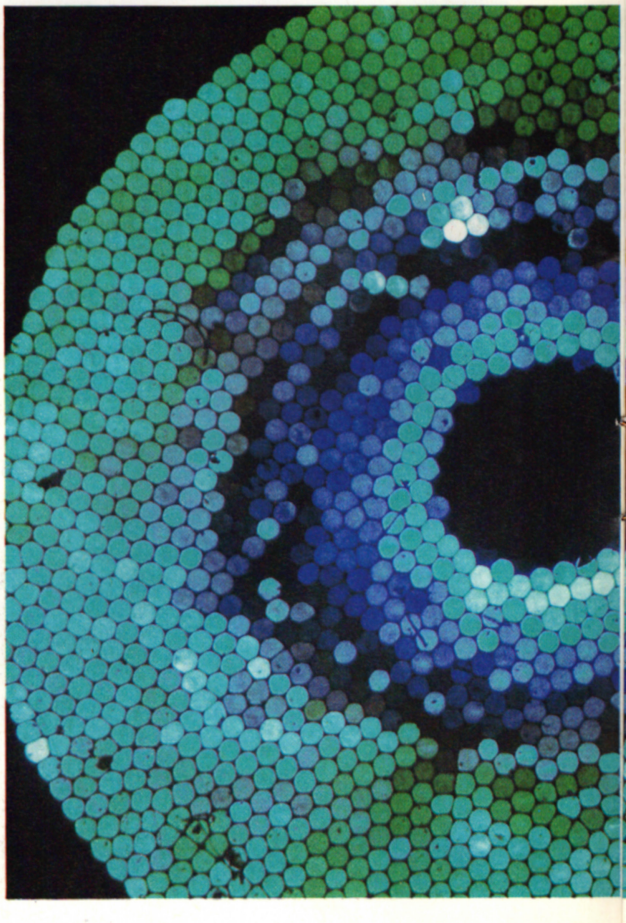
Betrayed by the senses

The more we learn about the mind, the less sure we can be that our senses convey the truth – even hallucinations seem 'real' enough to a witness. DAVID CHRISTIE-MURRAY assesses our ideas of reality

THE STORY OF RUTH (see page 2181) is not unique in the history of abnormal psychology. In psychiatric literature there are numerous examples of normal people who have for a period experienced hallucinations that they knew to be illusory yet that behaved as if they were real. The viewer walking round them saw their backs, they blocked out light and objects, were reflected in mirrors and appeared in double images when the side of the observer's eyeball was pressed, as real objects do. Having no objective reality, however, there was no way in which light could travel from them and affect the eye so as to register an image in the brain.

Yet in such cases the image is there – for at least one person. In the case of realised, waking hallucinations this must mean that, instead of light travelling from a real object, registering on and being interpreted by the viewer's brain, the brain itself must create an image and in some way 'project' it to the spot where it is seen. Similar processes must occur in hallucinations affecting the other senses, such as in auditory hallucinations.

A subject experiencing hallucinations



Our perception of the world is not always what it seems. A hologram of an apple (above) looks 'real' enough, yet it is only an image created by laser light. And even the concept of the apple's greenness would be quite meaningless to a person blind from birth. Animals also see the world differently: a bee might see the eye of a bird as huge and segmented (right); and dolphins (far right) use sonar with which to 'see' – and even, it is believed, possess a form of X-ray vision

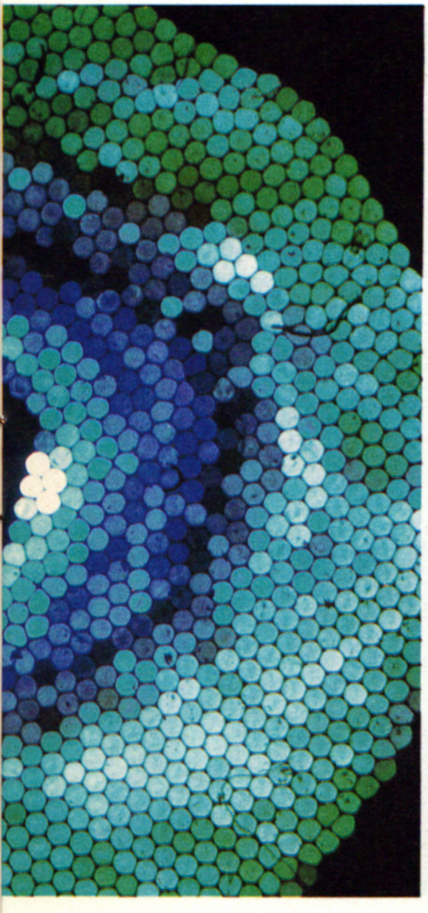
may feel that he or she is going crazy, seek psychiatric help and eventually, if lucky, be cured. There are, however, many types of hallucination – waking, sleeping, trance, hypnotic and semi-waking-sleeping – which seem so real that the subject cannot believe they do not 'really' exist.

Perchance to dream

Everyone experiences the hallucinations of dreams. Much of what we dream consists of unimportant fragments of memory, dramatisations of anxieties or desires escaping from subconscious repression, and sometimes simply the communication of physical discomfort – such as a dream of being suffocated when a pillow has slipped across one's face. Many apparently ordinary dreams are insignificantly precognitive, as J. W. Dunne argues in his *An experiment with time* (1927). Extraordinary dreams, marked out as veridical because of their startling vividness and impact on the dreamer, may sometimes be significantly precognitive. These are picture-shows inside the dreamer's mind and correspond to no external reality that his or anyone else's physical senses can apprehend at the time. Yet, if they prove precognitive, they are the shadows of coming events, as real as the shadow of a man overtaking you when the evening Sun is at your back.

In medieval times there was great fear of *incubi* and *succubi* – respectively male and female demons who had sex with sleeping women and men. These could be blamed for the sexual dreams that most people have from time to time. But modern psychiatry is discovering that some *somnambules* (such people are extremely susceptible to hypnotic suggestion) – a small number of females and a rather smaller number of males – can have such vivid sexual fantasies that they can reach orgasm. Phantom pregnancies are also known, one historical example being that of Mary Tudor who so yearned for a child that for a full nine months she showed all

Queen Mary I (1516–1558), whose marriage to Philip of Spain resulted in an hysteric, or 'phantom', pregnancy. In such cases all outward appearances indicate the progress of pregnancy; the woman ceases to menstruate and may suffer from morning sickness and other allied conditions – but there is no baby. It seems that the intense desire of the frustrated mother creates the cruel illusion of motherhood



A welcome visitor

Some years ago author David Christie-Murray was invited to lecture on psychical research at a school and was given dinner before the talk by the housemaster who had arranged the lecture. Another guest was the mother of two boys at the school, who told Mr Christie-Murray this story:

The woman had always longed for a daughter and, when her two sons were in their teens, she adopted a baby girl whom she came to adore. But when the girl was still only a toddler she was killed in a car crash. What was worse, the woman said, she herself had been driving the car, and the accident had been entirely her fault.

The loss of the child and the sense of crushing guilt made life doubly agonising for the grieving mother. One night, some time after the tragedy, she suddenly woke up and, overwhelmed by sorrow and feeling the need of comfort and companionship, tried to wake her husband. But it was impossible: he seemed to be in some kind of coma. In the end she gave up and in utter desolation went into what had been the child's bedroom and sat on her bed.

Then, quite suddenly, the little girl was standing in front of her. She held out her hands and said 'Mummy'. The mother opened her arms to the child, who climbed onto her lap and laid her head on her shoulder. She was solid and warm, flesh and blood – a 'living' child whose hair could be felt against her mother's cheek and heart-beat sensed against her breast. They sat in their joyful embrace for a short time. Then the little girl clambered down from her mother's lap and said 'Mummy, I have to go now' – and vanished.

The experience left the mother with a sense of joy as great as her previous desolation – and a total conviction of the survival of bodily death.

David Christie-Murray said: 'There was no doubt about the emotion and sincerity with which she told her story and, if she was a pretender trying to hoodwink a psychical researcher of long standing, she was a very convincing actress. If the experience was genuine, as I do not doubt it was, at least it shows that not all "otherworldly" encounters are hostile, sinister or sick.'

This story will confirm the Spiritualist belief that spirits can materialise in solid form (below: the alleged materialisation of Katie King at a seance in Rome in 1974). Yet others may dismiss such phenomena as tricks of the mind – which explains nothing. Ruth and many others will testify that the mind can play some very extraordinary 'tricks' indeed.

the signs of a developing pregnancy.

What is more astonishing – yet equally true, if psychiatrists are to be given more credence than medieval legend – is the incidence of 'spectral rape', defined by some as a 'serious phenomenon'. A significant number of women have reported having experienced this, both while sleeping and while waking, developing during the ghostly assault bruises, scratches and bites that could not possibly have been self-inflicted, even as a result of the hysteria induced by sexual repression and guilt – the usual medical explanation of such experiences. And there are instances where members of the victim's family claim to have seen a ghostly attacker dissolving before their eyes.

Flogging oneself to death

Even here the human mind may be the agent. A knife-slash can appear on the face of a man reliving a brawl under the influence of drugs or hypnosis. A girl believing herself to be the reincarnation of a slave flogged to extinction may collapse on what she thinks was the place of her death, whiplashes appearing spontaneously across the back. Such wounds are patently not self-inflicted physically yet may be so mentally, as much the 'stigmata' of a disturbed mind as those of a saint. As for the shadowy rapist seen by others, he could be an hysteric vision created and communicated by the victim to others.

Some of these phenomena are experienced while falling asleep, and some during the process of waking. These are the two twilight times in everyone's day, when we are particularly open to hallucinations or perhaps even visitations from another dimension. These occur when wakefulness is merging into sleep or sleep into wakefulness, called respectively *hypnagogic* and *hypnopompic* states. Some of the images experienced at these times seem so overwhelmingly real that even the most hardened sceptic experiencing them finds it impossible to believe that they do not correspond to some reality.

Cultural expectations often dictate the content of hallucinations. Somnambules have always existed, and in ages of greater superstition – or simple faith – assisted by herbal drugs, fasting, mortification of the flesh, meditation and cultural conditioning, have experienced either the orgies of witchcraft sabbats, or visions and communications from angels, the Virgin and the Christ. In our age, a similar kind of cultural conditioning may explain the hallucination of the woman who, while remaining seated beside her friends in a car, gave a running commentary of being taken on board a UFO (see page 1187).

Her experience is akin to the hallucinations of hypnosis where good subjects can be made to see people and objects that are not there and not to see others that are. And how 'real' is the chocolate or mustard that is tasted by both subject and hypnotist – although only the hypnotist has put them in his mouth? Or the pinprick or pinch felt by the subject but inflicted on the hypnotist?

It is said that what mystics see and feel while in their ecstasies is so different from everyday reality that there are no words to describe their experiences. The fourth-century St Anthony, having cut himself off from the world, was constantly beset by demons (above) or seductive women. He believed them to be 'real' enough to see and communicate with but, drawing on his faith, could dismiss them at will. A more modern mystic was the 19th-century writer Emily Brontë (right), whose ecstatic trances contrasted sharply with her everyday world of baking bread and supervising her down-to-earth Yorkshire household

The evidence points to the existence of many kinds of reality. One that is quite different from our workaday world is that of the mystic or visionary who, when in an altered state of consciousness, suddenly becomes at one with the whole of the Universe and its source. He or she remembers this moment of insight with a clarity that makes day-to-day reality seem as nebulous and insignificant as a dream.

But whether these other levels of reality are halfway houses between the commonplace world and the mystics' 'ultimate' reality, or whether at least some manifestations of them – such as hallucinations – are merely the aberrations of sick minds is a question that, at present, we cannot answer.

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The unexplored realm

Hypnotised subjects in a 1977 experiment gave imaginary accounts of UFO encounters that were remarkably like 'real' reports. HILARY EVANS asks: are alien – and supernatural – entities all in the mind, or not?

IN MARCH 1971 Brian Scott and a friend who wishes to be known as Eric Wilson were camping in the Arizona desert. One evening around 9 p.m. they saw a brilliant object hovering in the sky, some 5 miles (8 kilometres) away. It was oval shaped and dark but there was a bright haze around it and a brilliant purple light beneath it. Despite its distance, Scott pointed his flashlight at it, whereupon it began to approach them. When the object was overhead, it was so huge that it almost completely blocked out the sky, hovering over them at a height of some 200 feet (60 metres) and bathing them in purple light. They could see no windows, doors or other details of conventional aircraft.

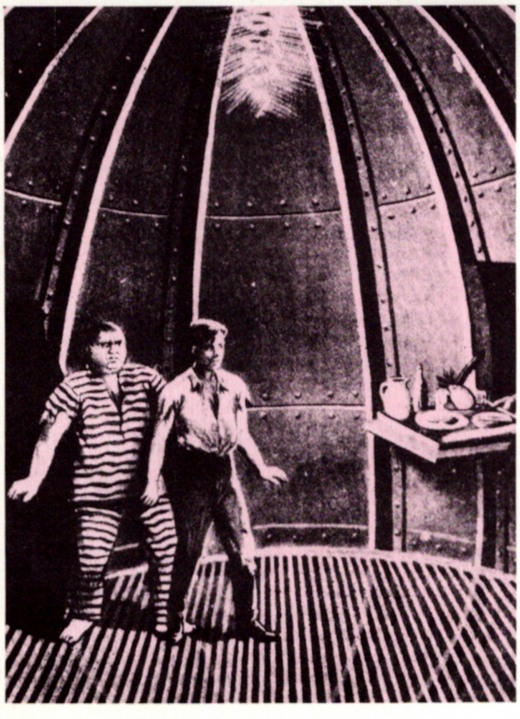
Scott remembered nothing more till they were in the car going towards home, but a time signal on his car radio revealed that it was 11 p.m. Two hours had elapsed, which neither of them could recall.

Some four years later, when Scott was 32 years old, he told a colleague of the experience and followed his suggestion to report it to UFO researchers. Their investigation led to an hypnosis session in the hope that it would help him to recall additional details.

Under hypnosis Scott said that he and Wilson had been taken into the UFO, where tall ugly entities with three-fingered hands had forced them to submit to a physical examination. The alien leader had been distant but not unfriendly. He said he came from 'another world, beyond all time, through years of light years . . .'. He told Scott: 'When I return, all will know the truth. Life will be lived through all time and knowledge will all be yours . . . . I am now, I was, and always will be.' In addition to these somewhat vague statements Scott reported more specific predictions as to Earth's future, including 'the complete annihilation of the Western hemisphere' from an easterly direction and involving bombs of high magnitude. But a few thousand persons are to be saved and taken to another plane of existence. This will occur on 24 December 2011.

Wilson did not corroborate Scott's account. In fact, he was reluctant even to admit that they had sighted a UFO, let alone that

Right: the *anima mundi* ('soul of the world') from an 18th-century manuscript. Such representations conform to Jung's theory of archetypes, which says that certain symbolic images lying in the unconscious have universal significance. Jung himself argued that UFOs and UFO entities are archetypal symbols



Left: an illustration from Bertrand Meheust's book of 1978, in which he argued that there were remarkable similarities between UFO accounts of the 1970s and science fiction stories of earlier periods. In most cases, those who reported the UFO sightings could not have read the stories – or even heard of them

Sleeping partners

In a wealthy home near Moray Firth in Scotland, an innocent young virgin was seduced by a 'marvellous beautiful youth' and confessed to her parents that she did not know where he came from or where he went after their love making. However, when the girl's parents broke into her bedroom, they found not a handsome youth but a hideous monster. The girl's lover was an incubus – a devil who forces sex on women. (A lustful devil who seduces men – as above – was known as a succubus.)

The story comes from a 17th-century compilation of 'operations of witches against the human race', collected by a monk from an obscure order in Milan in Italy. He says at the start: 'Almost all the Theologians and learned Philosophers are agreed, and it has been the experience of all times and all nations, that witches practise coition with demons, the men with Succubus devils and the women with Incubus devils.' Such sexual intercourse – for which even pleading rape was no defence – was punishable by the Church. During the fanatical witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, this could mean horrible torture, often ending in death.

Medieval demonologists maintained that incubi and succubi could assume human form, either as an apparition or in the flesh by using a dead body. Indeed, it was common for the rapacious demons to take on the form of the husband, wife or lover of the person they seduced. Deceived in this way or not, the mortal was guilty of committing a great sin in the eyes of the Church. Being assaulted by an incubus or succubus was very different from possession, for the possessed was regarded as a victim and was given help through exorcism. But it was believed that the sex devils could withstand exorcism. Paradoxically, anybody trafficking with them had to take the blame and bear the full punishment.

they had been abducted. Asked if he thought it possible that Scott had invented the whole affair, he said it was.

Eventually Wilson did allow himself to be hypnotised, but it did not affect his story. The hypnotist then suggested that he should forget about what *did* happen, and describe what he thought *might* have happened if a UFO sighting had actually taken place. 'I want you to use your imagination now. I want you to pretend you can see these things.' Wilson then gave an account. But was it fact or fiction? The investigator, John DeHerrerra, speculated:

> With this nagging doubt about the validity of the information obtained from a hypnotised witness, I thought it would be wise to conduct an experiment. If someone, under hypnosis, could be encouraged to visualise and describe an imaginary UFO abduction, how would it compare with a supposedly 'real' case? I shared this idea with the professor [Alvin Lawson] and the physician [Dr W. C. McCall]. They thought it was a great idea, so we began making preparations.

The experiment that followed, starting in early 1977, was arguably one of the most significant in the history of research into the paranormal. Its findings require us to take a fresh look at the interpretation of sighting reports.

Subjects for the experiment were recruited by means of an advertisement in a college newspaper, and were screened to eliminate anyone with a particular knowledge of or interest in UFOs. Like Wilson, they were asked under hypnosis to imagine themselves in a UFO encounter, and were encouraged by leading but non-specific questions to provide a detailed account. The results were astonishing, for the imaginative accounts were strikingly similar to the reports of allegedly 'real' abductees, with which the subjects could not have been familiar.

The experimenters wondered if the hypnotised subjects were somehow tuning in to the hypnotist, picking up his knowledge of UFO accounts and 'playing it back' as a

personal experience. But even granting telepathy and the known tendency for hypnotised subjects to tell the hypnotist what he wants to hear, it is stretching things to suggest that every subject was telepathic. It seemed more likely that some other process was at work.

Whatever that process may turn out to be, the DeHerrerra-Lawson-McCall experiment indicates that it is possible for people to imagine an experience in such detail that they seem to have had access to information that was theoretically beyond their reach.

Many people concluded that these results invalidated *all* abduction reports: it seemed reasonable to suppose that the allegedly 'real' abductees had invented their experiences just as the volunteer subjects had done. Lawson insisted that this was not a necessary consequence of the experiment. He pointed to conspicuous differences between the fictitious and the real accounts, not so much in *what* was said as in *how* it was said. However, this takes us into areas of psychology that are themselves still the subject of intense debate.

UFOs and science fiction

But there are other findings that are relevant to the question. In 1978, in his book *Science-fiction et soucoupes volantes*, the French ufologist Bertrand Meheust discussed the extraordinary similarities between accounts of UFO sightings in the 1970s and science fiction stories written half a century earlier – similarities that might have been ascribed to coincidence if they had occurred only once or twice, but not when they happened as often as Meheust found.

And how can we account for the fact that in 1976 an illiterate farmer in Argentina described an experience that matches in detail a story written for a French pulp science fiction magazine in the 1920s?

In 1977 another Frenchman, Michel Monnerie, drew attention to the significance of some *identified* flying object reports, in *Et si les OVNIs n'existaient pas?*; and in *The UFO handbook*, the American ufologist Allan Hendry also emphasised the value of studying such cases. In one instance Hendry cited, an intelligent middle-aged woman described how she had seen a cigar-shaped UFO with windows through which she could see the shapes of silver-suited occupants; but investigators proved beyond doubt that she had seen the planet Venus.

There is nothing new about mistaking Venus for a UFO. But why do witnesses, seemingly in all sincerity, add completely fictitious details?

It is almost as if, while describing something they have not seen, witnesses obtain the necessary information to fabricate their account: as though there is some kind of 'image bank' from which their unconscious minds can borrow the necessary details for their story.

Such a hypothesis brings us close to Carl Gustav Jung's concept of the 'collective unconscious', a reservoir of ideas and symbols that all of us share, and that we can draw on in the form of archetypes – symbolic forms that have broadly the same significance for us all. But the 'image bank' concept goes further, for it involves specific details that hardly qualify as universal symbols, but that occur time and time again in the reports. A UFO might be seen as an archetype, but the addition of a row of windows with silver-suited aliens peering out is an elaboration that takes it beyond the 'collective unconscious' theory.

It may well be that the reason why some people see one thing and some another is related to the personal and cultural background of the witness. Visions of the Virgin Mary are seen mostly by Catholics, rarely by Protestants and almost never by non-Christians. This may be accounted for by supposing that the Virgin chooses to manifest only to those who have faith in her, but it is equally well explained by suggesting that visions must be relevant to the beliefs and values of those who see them. Country people in the medieval period, deprived and repressed, had visions of being abducted by fairies to take part in non-stop orgies of feasting and drinking. An Essex schoolgirl of our own day, subconsciously seeking comfort or companionship, is visited by a space-woman who appears in her bedroom and discusses her personal problems.

Such cases encourage the view that all

The planet Venus, which has often been mistaken for a UFO. In such instances, witnesses usually add details such as windows and occupants. Even if UFOs are accepted as archetypes, these elaborations go beyond the Jungian theory – but they may support the idea that there is a kind of 'image bank' from which the unconscious mind can borrow, to complete the perception of an alien craft

Michel Monnerie, a French author who suggested that the way in which people misconstrue *identified* flying objects is significant and needs further study

such alleged experiences are purely psychological. It is in many ways the most plausible approach, and does not involve any 'supernatural' factors.

If we think of entity sightings as originating within the witness, what is the process involved? It could be triggered by some need on the part of the witness, such as a sudden crisis; it could result from the wish of a subject to comply with the suggestions of a hypnotist; or it could be an elaboration on a sighting of something strange and inexplicable. If this is so, we must suppose that the unconscious mind of the witness fabricates a coherent incident, in terms suitable to that witness's individual circumstances, and that this is presented to the conscious mind as if it were a real event occurring in the external world.

But some such factor as the 'image bank' is required if we are to account for the cases in which witnesses display knowledge of matters beyond their experience. If their unconscious mind is indeed responsible, then it must have the ability to bring in images and ideas from external sources to assist in imagining the 'false' sighting.

This is an assumption that many may feel disinclined to make: but the only alternative is to assume that the sighting does originate externally. External origination is not necessarily discounted by the fact that the sighting is so closely related to the individual's needs, hopes, fears or expectations. The Theosophical model (see page 2163) in fact accounts for this quite neatly. It assumes the existence of amorphous elementals, endowed with a great capacity for empathy. On the basis of the information they obtain from the mind of the witness, they instantaneously take on an appropriate form – one that will comfort, or frighten, or perhaps simply tease the witness – a benevolent alien visitor, a malevolent demon, a dancing fairy.

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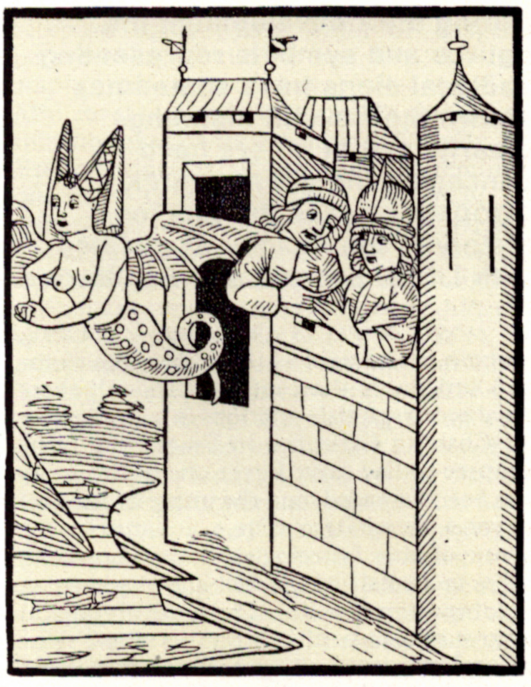


Right: the fairy Melusine, depicted in a medieval woodcut as she leaves her mortal husband. She comes closest in appearance to the strange creature reported by three American soldiers in Vietnam in 1969

Below: 14-year-old Blandine Piegay of France has been called 'the new Bernadette' because of her visions of the Virgin Mary – and crowds come to watch their meeting every Sunday. It is typical of entity sightings that the Virgin appears most often to young Catholic girls

While on night guard duty in Vietnam in 1969, three American servicemen reported seeing an amazing flying creature: a naked black woman with wings, giving off a kind of glow (see page 1168).

It seems unlikely that all three, even in the nervous state caused by night guard duty, would either imagine the same creature or misjudge a night-bird. It was not a case of not knowing *what* they had seen, for all three agreed as to its colour and shape and knew they had seen something remarkable; it was a case of not knowing *what it was* they had seen. Collective hallucination is sometimes offered as an explanation in such instances; but apart from the fact that it is far from certain whether the phenomenon of collective hallucination exists, we still need to know what caused the hallucination and where it originated.

In this case there does seem every reason to believe in the external reality of the entity; but at the same time the fact has to be faced that, although winged humanoids have been reported on many occasions from different parts of the world, no such being is known to science. Indeed, the creature that most resembles the description given by the servicemen is the fairy Melusine, as depicted in a medieval woodcut.

Could the men have seen a fairy? Or was it a demon? Or perhaps an extra-terrestrial alien? Was it a physical being? Perhaps such entities face us with the challenge of a different kind of reality, a hitherto unexplored realm in which our current notions of what is real are no longer valid.

During their development the figures and symbols representing zodiacal signs have sometimes shown their occult meanings clearly, and at others have concealed them. FREDERICK GOODMAN traces the tangled history of the images associated with Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius

Scales, serpents and centaurs

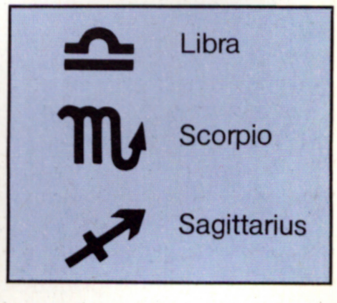
IN MOST RESPECTS the image of Libra, seventh of the signs of the zodiac, has changed little over the centuries, though there have been regional variations in some details. At Chartres Cathedral in France the 13th-century zodiac carved over one of the doors has been damaged, and the image of Libra is beyond recognition. On a column to the south of this 'astrological' door, however, there is a small image that shows a woman holding a pair of scales. The series of zodiacal figures ranged vertically on this single slender column is usually passed by, unnoticed by the casual observer, yet some of its images are quite out of the ordinary and worthy of close attention.

One of the most impressive medieval images of Libra is found among a set of zodiacal sculptures, now sadly depleted, carved by Benedetto Antelami, in the 12th century. The surviving figures are now in the baptistry in Parma. One shows a man – a rare choice for the image of Libra – holding disproportionately large scales, at the foot of a figure personifying the month corresponding to Libra (September–October in the modern calendar). The lack of proportion between the balance and the human figure may be a throwback to the early Egyptian image of Libra. This consisted of a pair of scales over which a small figure was placed in a circle. The circle is a kind of halo indicating that the figure within is an astral being, or god.

This image is related to the Egyptian *symbol* for Libra, which showed a disc above a bowl-like form. It is said to represent the setting Sun above the Earth. However, what is important in the symbol is the *space* between the Sun and the Earth – representing the air realm of Libra. It is the space that always exists between the male principle (the Sun) and the female (the Earth), which the impulse of Libra is forever trying to bridge.

This important idea of space (often symbolised as air in the esoteric tradition) is still contained implicitly in the modern symbol for Libra. Contrary to general belief, it is *not* derived from a pair of scales. The symbol functions like an equals sign between those for Virgo and for Scorpio. (In fact, the same sign is still used in mathematics to mean 'is approximately equal to'.) Libra symbolises the bridge that Virgo must cross to reach the Scorpio male. It is the space between the eternal Adam and the eternal Eve, between the feminine part of the human psyche (the anima) and the masculine part (the animus). In the zodiac Libra stands opposite to the selfish Aries, and in modern astrology the seventh house of the zodiac is often called 'the house of relationships'.

Because the triad of Virgo, Libra and Scorpio are so closely linked, astrologers have attempted to explain the curious forms of their symbols as expressing a threefold unity. It has been suggested, for example, that the terminal flourish on the symbol for Virgo was originally a representation of the female sexual organ, while the corresponding flourish on the symbol for Scorpio represented the male organ.



Top: a figure of Libra in Chartres Cathedral, France. The Egyptians depicted Libra as a pair of scales; in medieval Europe a human was shown holding them

Above: the symbols used in modern astrology for Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius

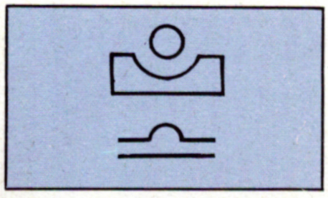
But it has also been argued that the symbols for Virgo and Scorpio were derived from a single drawing of a serpent, having a head, many coils and a tail. This was the serpent tempter in the Garden of Eden, whose evil work led to the sense of separation that now exists between the two sexes. A symbolic account of the development of the sign asserts that the serpent was cut in two, and from its body were fashioned the bodies of the first man and woman, who until that

time had not known separation.

Significantly, the severed head part became the symbol for Virgo, who is usually characterised by clarity of thought, while the tail became one of the symbols for Scorpio, which is associated with passion.

Historically the modern symbol for Scorpio does indeed have a serpentine origin. In Egyptian times the symbol was derived from the pictograph, in demotic script, for a snake. By late Greek times it approximated to the modern symbol, though still clearly related to the snake-like form of its origin. The occultist Agrippa, who wrote during the early 16th century, claimed that the modern symbol represented the sting of a scorpion, but he was merely guessing; the original was certainly based on the image of a snake.

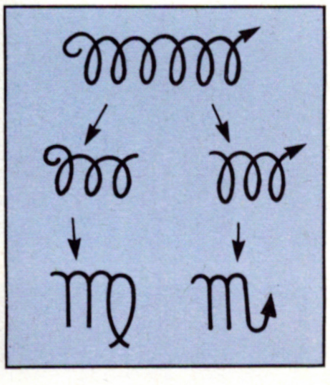
The image of Scorpio has had a chequered career, changing according to the current ideas of artists as to what a scorpion looked like. In areas where scorpions are plentiful, the images were fairly accurate; where they were known chiefly from travellers' tales, the images tended to be fanciful. The Egyptian zodiac at Dandara, for example, had a clear



Above: an Egyptian symbol for Libra, supposedly showing the Sun above the Earth, with its modern derivative. In each symbol the enclosed space denotes air, the realm of Libra

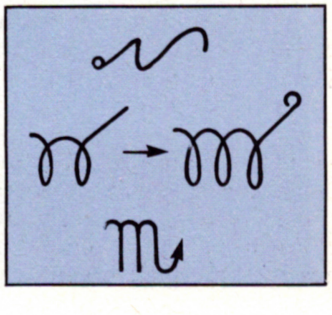
Left: a 12th-century male figure of Libra, carved by Benedetto Antelami

Below: one story has it that the symbols for Virgo and Scorpio arose when a snake-like form split – signifying the division between the sexes caused by the serpent in Eden



Right: the image of Scorpio from the abbey church at Vézelay, France – a brave attempt at depicting a creature the artist had apparently never seen

Below: the symbol for Scorpio developed from the symbol for a snake in Egyptian demotic script (top), through recognisably serpentine forms in late Greek times (centre), to the modern form (bottom)



scorpion figure. This strain of imagery persisted and found its way into, for example, the 13th-century zodiac at San Miniato al Monte, in Florence. In contrast to this, however, is the example at Vézelay, in France, which is almost comic: it reminds one more of a camel than a scorpion. A remarkable image of Scorpio from Chartres Cathedral has an almost demonic face, which expresses an important aspect of this sign.

In many ways Scorpio is the most difficult of the 12 signs to understand. A clue to its inner meaning is found in the fact that Scorpio is accorded rule over the sexual parts of the human being. The full significance of this can be grasped only when it is related to the medieval thinker's view of the world. The sexual parts were associated with hell, the dark forces, and the demonic in Man. This explains why the house of Scorpio is called the 'house of death'. Some modern astrologers make a further extension and call it the 'house of karma'; in Eastern traditions karma is the sum of a person's actions, good and bad, in one life, which influences his lot in the life following. An astrologer is usually able to tell something of a person's spiritual condition from the influence of this sign in his horoscope.

Strange duality

This connection with the darker forces accounts for the strange duality that astrologers associate with Scorpio. The true Scorpionic type appears always to be living under extremes of tension, as though caught between the forces of darkness and those of light. On the opposite side of the zodiac is Taurus, which, as previously explained, is linked with the Logos – the word of God expressed in the incarnation of Christ. The

Above: an image of Scorpio on the cathedral at Chartres has been given an almost demonic face

axis running from Scorpio to Taurus – which is, of course, present in all horoscopes – is a powerful one. The conflict between Scorpio, associated with hell, and Taurus, associated with Christ, dramatically represents the struggle between darkness and light taking place within all human beings.

The astrological relationship between the 'forces of light' of Taurus and the 'forces of darkness' of Scorpio is very ancient: it was established before Christianity, in the cult images of Mithraism – the ancient Persian religion of Mithras, god of goodness and light (see page 324). One such image shows Mithras cutting the throat of a bull. The blood of the bull spills onto the earth, fertilising it, while on the earth itself a scorpion attacks the genitals of the bull.

This portrayal of the opposition between Scorpio and Taurus is rich in astrological symbolism: the creative blood streams downwards, while the dark Scorpionic forces reach upwards – as heaven and earth interpenetrate. The image reminds us, too, that Taurus rules over the throat and larynx, while Scorpio rules the sexual parts.

The outcome of the conflicts in which Scorpio is involved is either that the spirit is enlightened or that it is weakened and borne down by darkness. This is the principal reason why Scorpio has been accorded two images in the esoteric tradition. The victory of the forces of darkness is represented by the scorpion, a creature condemned to live in the desert, carrying a poison in its body. The victory of the forces of light, however, is represented by the image of an eagle. This is the image that survived in Christianity as a symbol of the redeemed nature. The Evangelist St John is linked with Scorpio, and is accordingly represented by the symbol of the eagle. In many Christian pictures and carvings the eagle accompanies the bull of St Luke (Taurus), the lion of St Mark (Leo) and the winged figure representing St Matthew (Aquarius).

Warfare of light and darkness

Since there is warfare between light and darkness within the Scorpionic nature, it is not surprising that the cathedral builders positioned the images associated with Scorpio to take advantage of the movement of the Sun, just as they did with the images of Leo. As we saw earlier (see page 2174), Leo, which is ruled by the Sun, is often placed on the façade of a cathedral so that it is the first of the Evangelists' symbols to receive sunlight in the course of the day. Scorpio, connected with hell and the dark centre of the cosmos (according to the medieval view of the world), is correspondingly placed so that it is the last to receive the light. Notable examples are the groupings of figures in the cathedrals at Chartres and at Orvieto in Umbria, central Italy.

After the tortuous paths that we have had to follow to elucidate the symbolism of Scorpio, the symbolism of Sagittarius, the ninth sign of the zodiac, is relatively straightforward. From ancient times the image of Sagittarius has been a centaur about

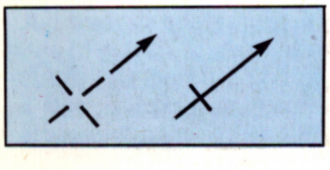
Above: the eagle, an alternative symbol for Scorpio, is often used in early Christian art to represent St John the Evangelist

Above right: Sagittarius represented as a centaur in the abbey church of Vézelay. The combination of man and horse expresses the marked conflict of the higher and lower Sagittarian natures

Below left: the sacrifice of a bull by the god Mithras. A scorpion attacks the bull's genitals, symbolising the opposition between Taurus (the forces of light) and Scorpio (the forces of darkness)

Right: Sagittarius is shown as a satyr in this quatrefoil on Amiens Cathedral, France

Below: the symbol for Sagittarius can be seen as an arrow lifting a cross-shaped burden – or as the Sagittarian's higher nature struggling to elevate his lower



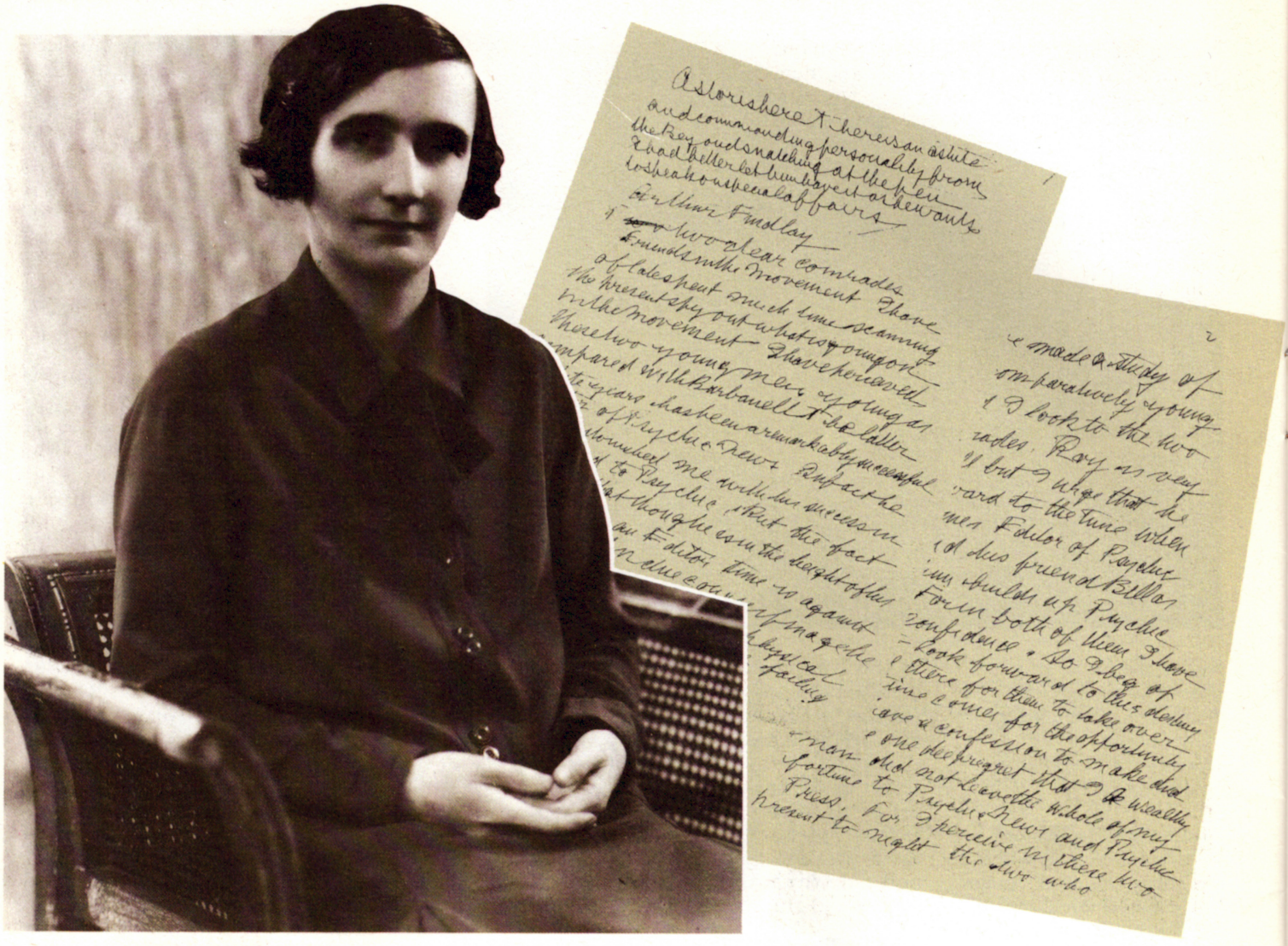
to shoot an arrow from a bow. However, there are examples of Sagittarius being represented as a human being – for example, in a fine carving in the baptistry at Parma. Such a symbolism is curious, for an important aspect of the Sagittarian nature is represented by the more usual centaur figure, part-human, part-animal. It emphasises that those who are influenced by this sign are pulled downwards by their appetites. Sagittarians delight in good food, stimulating

company and the pleasures of the flesh. But their lower nature is depicted as a horse because it can be tamed to serve the aspirations of the spirit.

In a quatrefoil on the cathedral at Amiens, northern France, the archer is represented not as a centaur but as a satyr-like figure, with hairy legs, a bushy tail and cloven feet – a clear reference to an earthy, even bestial, lower nature. This image, too, expresses the astrological view that the Sagittarian finds it difficult to master the demands of his body and to free himself from his somewhat possessive love of the physical realm.

This predicament is expressed in the symbol of Sagittarius, which can be traced back to early Greek horoscopes. It is more than a simple drawing of an arrow: it can be broken down into an arrow, the symbol of a spiritual impetus, lifting a burden represented by a cross at the arrow's tail. This burden is the Sagittarian's natural desire for sensual enjoyment and gratification. He is lifted by his spiritual impulse to rise above the delights of the flesh and to pay regard to higher things. A Sagittarian who is highly developed and has learned to put his earthier nature at the service of his higher self is one of the freest of beings, who fully deserves the epithet 'human'. An undeveloped Sagittarian, on the other hand, is caught up in the demands of the lower world and tends more and more to the animal state. The satyr at Amiens perhaps expresses this idea more poignantly than the standard image of the centaur: certainly the entire symbolism is lost in those occasional modern representations of Sagittarius that separate his two aspects and depict a rider on a horse.

On page 2234: the concluding signs of the zodiac – Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces



Telling tales

Of the 22 books written by Geraldine Cummins, 15 were 'transmitted' through automatic writing. ROY STEMMAN assesses the talents of this highly respected medium, best-known for the fascinating Cummins-Willett scripts

GERALDINE CUMMINS could probably have become a playwright or novelist of some distinction. Instead, she chose to 'lend a hand' to others as an automatic writing medium. And it was in this guise that the diminutive Irishwoman achieved worldwide fame.

The fifth child of a family of 11, she was born in 1890 in the county of Cork. She won early acclaim in the literary field, being just 22 years old when one of the first plays she collaborated on was performed at Dublin's renowned Abbey Theatre. Geraldine Cummins also wrote short stories, some of which were published in London's *Pall Mall Gazette*, and a couple of historical novels set in Ireland. But of the 22 books published in her name, 15 were 'transmitted' through her automatic writing rather than created consciously. For any thoughts Geraldine may have had of a conventional literary career vanished soon after she met the medium Hester Dowden.

Geraldine Cummins and a sample of her automatic writing from a 1967 seance. She did not have a great deal of psychic aptitude in early life, but worked hard to develop her mediumistic powers – and did so with outstanding success

Geraldine attended her first seance with Hester Dowden in Paris, and sat spellbound as messages were given on a ouija board. One communicator was a Frenchman who said that 'rivers of blood' would flow in France and 'many houses will be destroyed, great numbers of people rendered homeless and thousands will die.'

The seance, which took place in June 1914, made a lasting impression when the events of August – the start of the First World War – proved the prophecy right.

Under Hester Dowden's guidance, Geraldine began experimenting with spirit communication. First she used a ouija board and then moved to automatic writing. She lived with Hester Dowden during the later years of the First World War, devoting long and tedious hours to developing her powers. For, unlike other great mediums, she showed but little psychic aptitude early in life.

By the mid 1920s Geraldine Cummins was producing automatic writing scripts at a remarkable rate. On one occasion witnesses

confirmed that she wrote 1750 words in one hour and five minutes. But it was the content of the scripts that impressed investigators rather than the speed with which they were produced.

Through Geraldine's hand, apparently guided by someone calling himself 'the messenger', came a chronicle about early Christian history. The communicator was said to be an agent of someone called Cleophas, and he gave information about the period between the death of Jesus and St Paul's departure from Berea to Athens.

The Abbey Theatre in Dublin is world famous. The 22-year-old Geraldine Cummins had a play produced there in 1912, two years before the seance that changed the direction of her life

There was so much interest in these scripts that Geraldine Cummins allowed distinguished churchmen, scholars and psychical investigators to watch at her side while she rapidly and 'automatically' wrote what was being transmitted through her.

These writings, published as *The scripts of Cleophas*, contained over one million words. Even if Geraldine Cummins had wanted to fake the messages, she knew no Greek, Hebrew or Latin to help her research the subject. But she was not accused of fraud: the scholars testified that the scripts 'contain much which, on consideration of the life and mentality of the intermediary, Miss Cummins, appears quite inexplicable on the supposition of human authorship'.

There is another factor that seems to speak for the authenticity of the scripts as messages from 'outside herself'. For they went against Geraldine Cummins's nature and culture. As she said:

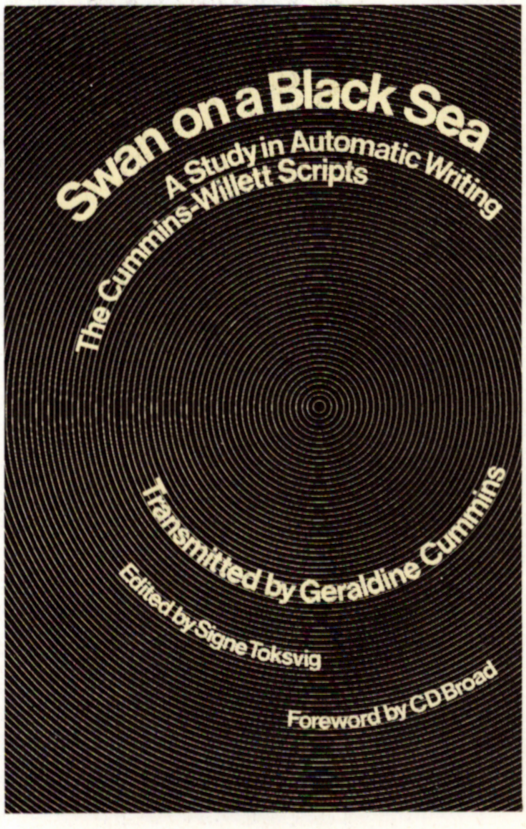
> I am not proud of the Cleophas Series as I feel such writings are not of me, are foreign in character to my Celtic, racial self. Lastly, because of his reactionary remarks about women, I disliked St Paul. Why then was I compelled against my will and prejudices to write about him in such laudatory terms?

Whatever the truth about the Cleophas scripts, Geraldine Cummins produced many others, of which some appear to provide evidence of life after death. For example, the series of scripts she 'received' from an Australian writer, Ambrose Pratt, are included in Professor Raynor Johnson's book *The light and the gate* (1964). They convinced many people that Pratt had succeeded in communicating with Geraldine Cummins after his death.

These scripts were much publicised, but Geraldine Cummins also produced many private communications for her sitters. These were frequently full of significant and convincing details.

Among those who consulted her privately was Mackenzie King, three times prime minister of Canada at various times from 1921 to 1948. The former American president Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had died in 1945, apparently used Geraldine's hand to write messages to Mackenzie King in 1948. In the first of these, he accurately prophesied the unexpected outbreak of the Korean War two years later and De Gaulle's coming to power in 1958.

For most people, the best evidence produced by this remarkable medium for survival after death occurred towards the end of her life. It started in August 1957 when she was 67 years old. One day while she was on holiday in Ireland, a letter arrived from W. H. Salter, honorary secretary of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). He



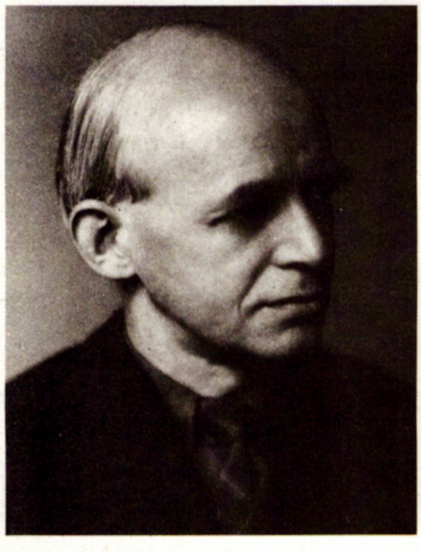
Swan on a black sea, the edited version of the scripts 'dictated' to Geraldine Cummins by the medium Mrs Willett. The title comes from a phrase in the scripts themselves

wrote: 'A member of the SPR who lost his mother some months ago would like to give her the opportunity of sending him a message. I believe that this is a case that would interest you evidentially.' All that Geraldine was given was the man's name: Major Henry Tennant.

The Major's mother was Winifred Coombe Tennant, a woman high in society as well as active in public life. What was particularly significant for this experiment, however, was that Winifred Coombe Tennant had also been a gifted automatic writing medium who had kept her real identity secret by working under the pseudonym of Mrs Willett.

Five days after being given Major Tennant's name, Geraldine Cummins received the first script from his mother. She had other pressing affairs at the time, but she undertook Salter's request quickly because, she said, 'Otherwise these critical people would say I spent time making inquiries about this blasted major.'

Right: Mrs Winifred Coombe Tennant, who always kept her identity as the medium Mrs Willett a secret. Her son consulted Geraldine Cummins to make contact with her – from which resulted the famous Cummins-Willett scripts. A writer who analysed both the creative and 'transmitted' work of Geraldine Cummins has said that she 'could not possibly have invented Mrs Willett'



Pro and con: Professor E. R. Dodds (above left), though a lifelong friend of Geraldine Cummins, did not believe in the Willett scripts. On the other hand, Professor C. D. Broad (above) found them 'a very important addition' to the evidence for life after death. Perhaps most convincing of all, Mrs Willett's sceptical son was 'deeply impressed' by their accuracy and detail

The communications she received were richly detailed and captured the personality of Mrs Coombe Tennant as the remarkable woman she was. Not everyone was impressed, however. E. R. Dodds, Regius professor of Greek at Oxford University, president of the SPR from 1961 to 1962, and a lifelong friend of Geraldine Cummins, wrote privately to Mrs Coombe Tennant's sons, Alexander and Henry, that there was 'internal evidence pointing in the direction of conscious or unconscious fraud' in the scripts. Did Geraldine Cummins know that Mrs Willett, her communicator, was really Mrs Coombe Tennant? The secret was well-guarded, but others have also suggested that in the comparatively small psychic circles of that time, it is highly likely that Geraldine would have learned of her fellow medium's true identity.

Even if she had indeed known the identity of the communicator she had been asked to contact, could she have produced scripts containing such intimate information without being in mind-to-mind contact with Winifred Coombe Tennant? For part of these scripts were 'too correct about private affairs to be published', according to their editor, Signe Toksvig.

Many who have studied the 40 scripts as published in *Swan on a black sea* (1965) are convinced that they provide some of the best evidence for life after death.

Professor C. D. Broad, a former SPR president and fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, wrote an analytical 52–page foreword to the book, in which he said:

> I believe these automatic scripts are a very important addition to the vast mass of such material which *prima facie* suggests rather strongly that certain human beings have survived the death of their physical bodies and have been able to communicate with certain others who are still in the flesh.

Perhaps the final word should come from Major Henry Tennant, to whom the scripts are addressed. Winifred Coombe Tennant's youngest son was initially sceptical about spirit communication. In a letter to the medium he wrote: 'The more I study these scripts the more deeply I am impressed by them.' He found only one incorrect name. 'Every other name and reference is accurate, and to me very evidential and at times surprising. There was no tapping of my mind because much appears that I never knew.'

The Cummins-Willett scripts, as they came to be known, were the crowning glory of Geraldine Cummins's career as a medium. They were published only four years before she died at her Chelsea home in London. Always questioning of her own powers, she admitted that with the Willett scripts, she was satisfied that her mediumship had produced telling evidence of life after death.

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mind that the marks had been made by his rubber gloves.

Then there was the night that Cornell may have caught Dr Richards faking paranormal raps – or not, as the case may be. The raps had been heard in the Richardses' kitchen, and Ed Cox had climbed under the table to try to locate their source. At this point Cornell saw Richards tap the side of a kitchen unit. The problem, he admitted, was that the sound of the rap was dull and fleshy – and he had not been able to reproduce it by tapping his fingers on *any*thing. Cornell also mentioned another occasion on which raps had seemed to be coming from the general direction of Tom Richards and suggested, a trifle extravagantly, that these had possibly been caused by the flapping of trouser legs. Ed Cox's objection to the finger-tapping 'theory' was simply that Richards is a notoriously fidgety man.

Any fidgeting at the banality of the discourse thus far was soon stilled by Cornell's *pièce de résistance* – his own 'minilab film'. This, he stressed, was a serious attempt to inject some hard evidence into the argument that the SORRAT films could – or could not – have been made by stop-frame technique. (The objection has usually been supported by claims of enormous cost, the need for resources beyond the reach of incompetent amateurs, and so on.) Cornell's film blew the argument sky high.

'To our spirit friends'

Gratuitously titled *The SOWHAT experiment*, the film was superior to the original in almost every respect: in colour, clarity, and the sheer scale and pointlessness of the effects. Small furry monsters chased each other inside and outside the glass tank. Glasses of liquid mysteriously filled and emptied. Air mail envelopes slid across the screen. All very fine, for this did prove the point about a *possible* fraud at work with the Rolla minilab. Then cans of beans and packets of cornflakes began to dance in and out of the tank. Dedications were shown 'To our spirit friends'. The audience was in the aisles.

Not that there weren't critics of the film. The most vociferous was Brian Inglis, a consultant to *The Unexplained*, who leapt to his feet and shouted, 'I hate everything to do with SORRAT, but this is the most degrading spectacle I've ever seen!' Stanley Krippner, on one of his relatively few visits to the meeting he was chairing, suggested Mr Inglis sit it out. Tony Cornell, considerably less embarrassed than most of the audience, chipped in: 'Why don't you do as you're told, Mr Inglis, and sit down. And *shut up*.' Inglis declined the offer.

Then it was W. E. Cox's turn. He began by saying that anyone could replicate effects 'under magicians' conditions' but immediately confused the issue by admitting, rather disarmingly, that 'Sure, there were some suspicious effects on the original minilab film, but they didn't add up to much.' He then spoke in general terms about the paranormal events that had occurred in his presence both inside and outside the minilab: he had had raps on the roof of his car that 19 times out of 20 correctly indicated the number that showed on thrown dice, wooden rings had been linked (see page 1250), and other odd effects. Then he went through a number of frames from the minilab film, pointing out, for instance, that in the midst of one sequence in which leather rings appeared to link paranormally, a single frame showed only *one* ring present. 'What fraud would bother to do that?' he asked; to which the answer is: The fraud who plans to ask such a question.

Throughout his session, Cox implied that the audience was *obliged* to believe him. It never seemed to cross his mind that anyone would suspect him, though in so many cases he is the planner, experimenter, technician and sole witness of what he says happens. We had seen from the Cornell film that rings could be made to *appear* paranormally linked, and we had seen from Cox's frame-by-frame stills that the rings did not, ever, link on camera. And the quality of the Rolla film is so poor, the 'set' so ill-lit, that all manner of magnets and strings could be lurking in the shadows. So why *doesn't* Cox use the standard procedure, call in independent witnesses, issue protocols, and improve his equipment?

One of the odd side effects of this long and tiring evening was that Ed Cox ended up with his dignity intact and a good deal of sympathy from the audience, for it had, as one participant put it, turned into something like a trial. Despite the reservations just mentioned, it had still been something of a Star Chamber matter, with none of the most obvious questions asked and no real debate on the issues raised. Julian Isaacs, who has done more than anyone to publicise the Rolla films, was conspicuously absent most of the evening and left well before question time. At the end Cox remained serenely smoking his pipe, his box as full of secrets as ever. Though not part of the official proceedings of the conference, the workshop had scarcely shown psychical research at its most objective or admirable. Perhaps someone, one day, will bring all the participants and all the relevant experts into the same room for a sane and thorough discussion. Perhaps.

On trial at Trinity

Apports, teleportations, psychokinesis on a grand scale – and all recorded on film by an objective investigator. This is the claim, at least, made for the phenomena that have occurred in Rolla, Missouri, as a result of William 'Ed' Cox's minilab experiments. The films have generated a white-hot debate among parapsychologists, and part of the controversy surfaced during a special workshop at the Society for Psychical Research's centenary conference in August 1982. THE UNEXPLAINED witnessed the fray

'It goes without question that this is the work of spirits – but whether of this world or the next is unsure . . . but they *are* intelligent.' This is W. E. Cox's own summary of the apparently psychokinetic effects claimed for the SORRAT minilab (see page 1210). At the SPR's workshop less charitable claims – not to say innuendoes – were aired concerning the filmed and anecdotal evidence.

When Julian Isaacs first presented the films in 1980 he made the point that even if the SORRAT minilab were a fraud, the minilab was a superb experimental tool that others could use to replicate psychokinetic effects under fraud-proof conditions. This challenge had been taken up by the first speaker, Dr Peter Phillips, of the McDonnell Laboratory for Psychical Research, based in St Louis. He had spent some months with the Richardses (the apparent centres of the phenomena) and had installed his own minilab and cameras in their basement at Rolla – but with few conclusive results. Seven rolls of film had been shot, clips from which he showed. In one, a piece of woollen braid apparently twirled of its own volition inside the glass box. In another, a tin box jerked about on the floor of the minilab. The best piece of evidence for PK, he felt, was the sight of a piece of paper shuffling about rather tamely – and even that, as Phillips admitted, was hard to see. Why did he think PK might not have been at work on the other objects? With studied casualness Phillips mentioned that the braid, which had been supplied by Cox, had been discovered to have a clothes pin embedded in it. And there had been a sufficiently large gap between the curtain behind the minilab and the wall to have inserted a magnet, and thus caused both tin box and braid to move.

Apparently unmoved, or simply unaware of the implied slur, Cox interjected that a toy windmill in the minilab had revolved, and pointed out that even Phillips had remarked that the camera had on several occasions been triggered in some way not understood.

Summing up, Phillips implied that Cox could have cheated, but that there was no conclusive evidence that he had. One had the feeling that public character assassination was not Dr Phillips's style, though it will be interesting to read his full length report on the Rolla experiments when it is published.

The next speaker was less concerned with such niceties. Tony Cornell, co-author of *Poltergeists* and president of the Cambridge University SPR, warmed up to his onslaught by describing the pleasant stay he had enjoyed with Dr J.T. Richards and his wife Elaine. Where Dr Phillips had attempted to give the Richardses some anonymity by referring to them only as 'JTR' and 'ER', Cornell apparently considered this an unnecessarily coy gesture and blithely named them. Cox, too, had been unreservedly pleasant and co-operative. Behind all this, one felt, something was brewing. It was.

Untouched by human hand

Cornell had laid some complicated traps for the minilab – or Cox or Richards – before leaving. He had decided to test what many consider to be the most suspect – or outrageous – of the phenomena surrounding the minilab: its allegedly paranormal ability to get letters into the postal system (sometimes with exotic stamps equally paranormally attached). Cornell had bought some 'virgin proof paper', which he handled only with rubber gloves, placed sheets of it in envelopes addressed to various interested psychical researchers, and duly taken it to the home of the minilab. All four letters turned up, though some arrived by rather bizarre routes, at their destinations, and Cornell then proceeded to have them microscopically examined. 'I told the agency that did it that I wouldn't mention their name,' he said disingenuously, 'but if any of you break any laws you might meet the same gentlemen.' And the police – who else? – did indeed find fingerprints – or at least marks that may have been made by fingers – on the brand new, untouched-by-human-hand paper. This seemed to be sufficient indication to Cornell that human rather than paranormal means had been used to mail the letters. The thought did not seem to enter his

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